A PROPOSAL FOR THE ESTABLISHMENT OF AN

URBAN DESIGN REVIEW

PROCEDURE FOR REGINA

CITY OF REGINA
URBAN PLANNING DEPARTMENT
MARCH, 1988

A Proposal for the Establishment of an Urban Design Review Procedure For Regina

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A Proposal for the Establishment of an Urban Design Review Procedure For Regina

Background:

The idea of having an Urban Design Advisory Committee is not new to the City. It was proposed as part of the "Mainstreet" (Rochdale Boulevard) procedures in 1979. The report on Urban Design for the Downtown dated November, 1982 suggests a committee. In October 1983, City Council adopted a recommendation for the establishment of such an advisory body in association with the Transitional Area Development Plan.

During the time when the report "Downtown in the City", dated October, 1983 was under public review, the idea of such an advisory committee was discussed with several groups and associations including the Saskatchewan Association of Architects. A report on the subject was prepared at the time but no action was taken.

There now appears to be renewed interest. Active consideration is being given to the introduction of design review procedures in the Transitional Area, through the mechanisms of Provincial Heritage legislation. The Saskatchewan Association of Architects appears to be interested in the subject again. Some members of the Regina Planning Commission have expressed interest.

Purpose:

This report is an informational statement intended to provide the basis for a discussion of the benefits and costs of Urban Design Review procedures.
It contains a specific outline for the establishment of an Advisory Urban Design Review Committee.

Urban Design - A Definition

A distinction must be drawn between urban design and the architectural design of individual buildings. Urban design is concerned with the relationship of individual buildings to their environment including existing buildings, streets and sidewalks and all the physical components that constitute the landscape of the City.

It is not intended that an urban design review process would review and/or criticize such matters as colour, materials and/or design details such as windows, doorways, parapets and the multitude of other architectural appurtenances. There may be occasions however, where design details are important in the environmental context. For instance when a proposal is made for a building of say reflective glass material in a location where all the existing buildings are of say brick or masonary construction, then it will be useful to obtain professional advice as to whether the contrasting form is justified. Would it be a discordant element or would it add vibrancy and visual delight to the area?

Urban design advice is more relevant to the built-up downtown and inner City neighbourhoods than at the edge of the City. It can be considered to be relevant along a number of the arterial streets that are heavily travelled and along those highways and streets that are the approaches to the City for tourists and visitors.

The 1983 Planning and Development Act, enables the City to prepare zoning and other procedures. The Provincial authorities did not accede to the City's request that explicit reference be made to the establishment of design review committees. It could be argued that the Province is opposed to such a process. However, the City Council, and through it the Planning Commission, has the authority to appoint advisory committees. The Planning Commission is, in itself, an advisory committee.

Urban Design Guidelines and Criteria

If an urban design review committee is to be effective, then some approved urban design guidelines or performance criteria are

necessary. The committee needs to know the ground rules i.e. the urban design ideals which City Council believes to be desirable. The developers and their architects need to have the same information.

Design guidelines have been established for the downtown and are included in the zoning (see page 9). There is also back-up documentation for downtown in the form of two reports, one on the subject of Urban Design and another on Heritage sites. For the Transitional Area there are no specific guidelines and the objectives for streetscape design etc., are expressed in the most general terms. Some of the "Mainstreet" guidelines are design oriented but most of them refer to land-use arrangements.

Advisory Urban Design Review Committee - Membership

There are urban design review committees in other Canadian cities. In every case the design professions including, architects, landscape architects, and civil engineers, constitute the majority of the members. The members are selected by their own professional organizations and then ratified by the City Council. In some cases citizens-at-large or persons in related organizations such as developers, historians or community leaders are appointed in order to broaden the advisory base or to provide for continuity within the administration.

A membership appropriate to, and suggested for, the City of Regina is as follows:

a) Three architects who shall be members of the Saskatchewan Association of Architects;
b) One landscape architect who shall be a member of the Saskatchewan Association of Landscape Architects;
c) Two members at large who shall represent the engineering profession, the development industry and/or the business community;
d) The Chairman, for the time being, of the Regina Planning Commission, or his designate.

With a seven member committee, four would represent a quorum at a meeting. Appointments would be for a two year period. The committee would select its own chairman. A procedure for rotating membership would be established.

Staff support from within the Civic Administration would be essential. Normal practice would be for a member of the Planning Department to be appointed as "secretary".

He/she would:

a) inform the chairman and members of the committee when there is a development proposal to bring before them and set a date and time for a meeting;
b) prepare for the meeting, ensuring that all the necessary information is available;
c) record the discussion and advisory recommendations of the committee;
d) prepare a report, and/or the part of a report, for submission to the Regina Planning Commission and through them to City Council.

Decisions would remain in the hands of City Council. The Council can accept or reject the advice. The usefulness of such a committee would be questioned if City Council were consistently to ignore their advice.

It is not uncommon for the developer or his architect to wish to carry out design changes, if there is criticism from the committee. Such changes are invariably mutually agreed upon by the architect for the developer or proponent and the Committee before his proposal is submitted for decision.

Meeting Schedules

The meeting schedule for an advisory Urban Design Review Committee would of course have to relate to and coincide with the schedule of City Council and/or the Planning Commission. However, since the type of proposals for which a review procedure would be appropriate could not be pre-determined the meeting schedule could be subject to variation. An appropriate meeting schedule could be for a monthly meeting with the option for extra meetings up to twice a month. It is probable that there would be no items for consideration during some months. This is particularly so in Regina's case because of the sharp contrast between summer and winter and the seasonal effect on construction activities.

Common Misconceptions

It is a commonly held belief that "Urban Design" is a product of "architects and architecture." But if it is not, neither is it the product of "town planners" or "landscape architects" or "engineers." It is the sum total product of all of these professionals seen together as it is

impacted upon by "bankers" who control the flow of money and "politicians" who make decisions. The following quote is taken from a recent issue of "The Planner" a publication put out by the Royal Town Planning Institute, quote:

"The inescapable reality for all of us is that people judge architecture and planning, landscape and engineering by the quality - principally the physical quality - of what they see and experience around them. They are, correctly and understandably, more concerned with the function and attractiveness of places as a whole and less with individual buildings, plans and procedures, however brilliant and well-conceived each of these may be in its own right."

The Benefits

A major benefit is that architects and others who design the buildings in the City are forced to become aware of the environment into which their buildings will be placed. New buildings are more likely to be individualized to the properties on which they are to be located. No longer is it possible for a standard design which is punched out in the head office, say in Ontario, to be simply imposed upon the Regina scene.

A second benefit is that the City Council, as approving authority, gains the confidence that new buildings will be environmentally acceptable. New buildings are less likely to raise citizen anger for community values will have been considered. Urban design, by definition, takes account of each specific environment.

Another effect is that each significant new building is designed by someone with design training. That is not to say that the City Administration will only accept permit applications where a registered architect is involved. Rather is it that the review process raises the awareness level of all concerned. Clients are more likely to seek competent professional advice.

Some building forms should not be referred to an urban design review process. For single family homes, personal taste considerations are generally more important than urban design concepts. Public buildings, which are often the urban landmarks, should always be referred through an urban design review process. The Wascana Authority has had a design review procedure in effect for some time.

The Costs

It is often suggested that the introduction of a design review process causes delays in permit consideration and approval. Evidence from other cities, where such procedures are in force, indicates this is not so. Delays are far more likely to occur as a result of the failure, on the part of the developers who complain, to provide adequate and appropriate information. Design review procedures can be undertaken concurrently with the other necessary City review procedures.

There are direct and indirect costs associated with the work of any committee. The members generally serve without compensation. However, there is a cost in providing a meeting place, coffee, etc. and above all, there is staff time required.

Procedure

The establishment of an Urban Design Review Committee is in itself straight forward. The choice of the areas where the procedure would be beneficial can be made and a proposal is illustrated on the plan attached to this report. Guidelines should be established to determine when a proposal warrants referral to design review. This can be done on purely subjective grounds and/or the decision made by the "secretary" based upon his knowledge of the City and urban design principles. Alternatively, it might be decided that only specific building types, or only public buildings or only large scale proposals be submitted.

The major challenge, in making an urban design review committee effective, is in the preparation and acceptance of urban design guidelines. Depending on the degree of detail needed and the number of different parts of the City under consideration this task could take anything from 4 man months to 12 man months. Furthermore, it is a task that requires staff (or a consultant) with an urban design background.

Summary

An Urban Design Review Committee has been considered in Regina on several occasions. As a result of the recent planning work for the Downtown and Transitional Areas the idea has received favourable comment. There is an emerging understanding that urban design is different from architectural design.

There is a question as to whether there are a sufficient number of development proposals being made, to justify the establishment of an Advisory Urban Design Review Committee. Provincial enabling legislation is such that the City has the power to establish such a committee provided that the role of that committee is clearly advisory.

Appropriate design guidelines have been established for the Downtown but are still required for other parts of the City. They need to be kept simple and clear and would be prepared in a priorized order for different parts of the City.

There are urban design review committees in other Canadian cities, some with 30 and more years of continuous service. This experience can be drawn upon to establish a committee suited to Regina's needs.

Recommendation

It is recommended that:

1) This report be formally submitted to the following organizations for their consideration and response.

   - The Saskatchewan Association of Architects
   - The Saskatchewan Association of Landscape Architects
   - The Association of Professional Community Planners of Saskatchewan
   - The Saskatchewan Association of Professional Engineers
   - The Minister of Urban Development, Province of Saskatchewan
   - The Regina Market Square Board
   - The Housing and Urban Development Association of Canada
   - Regina Branch and at the same time report be made available to such other organizations and groups that indicate an interest in the subject.

2) A deadline of May 30, 1988 be established for the receipt of written submissions and the Administration be instructed to bring in a report, to the Regina Planning Commission, with recommendations for future action no later than June 30, 1988.

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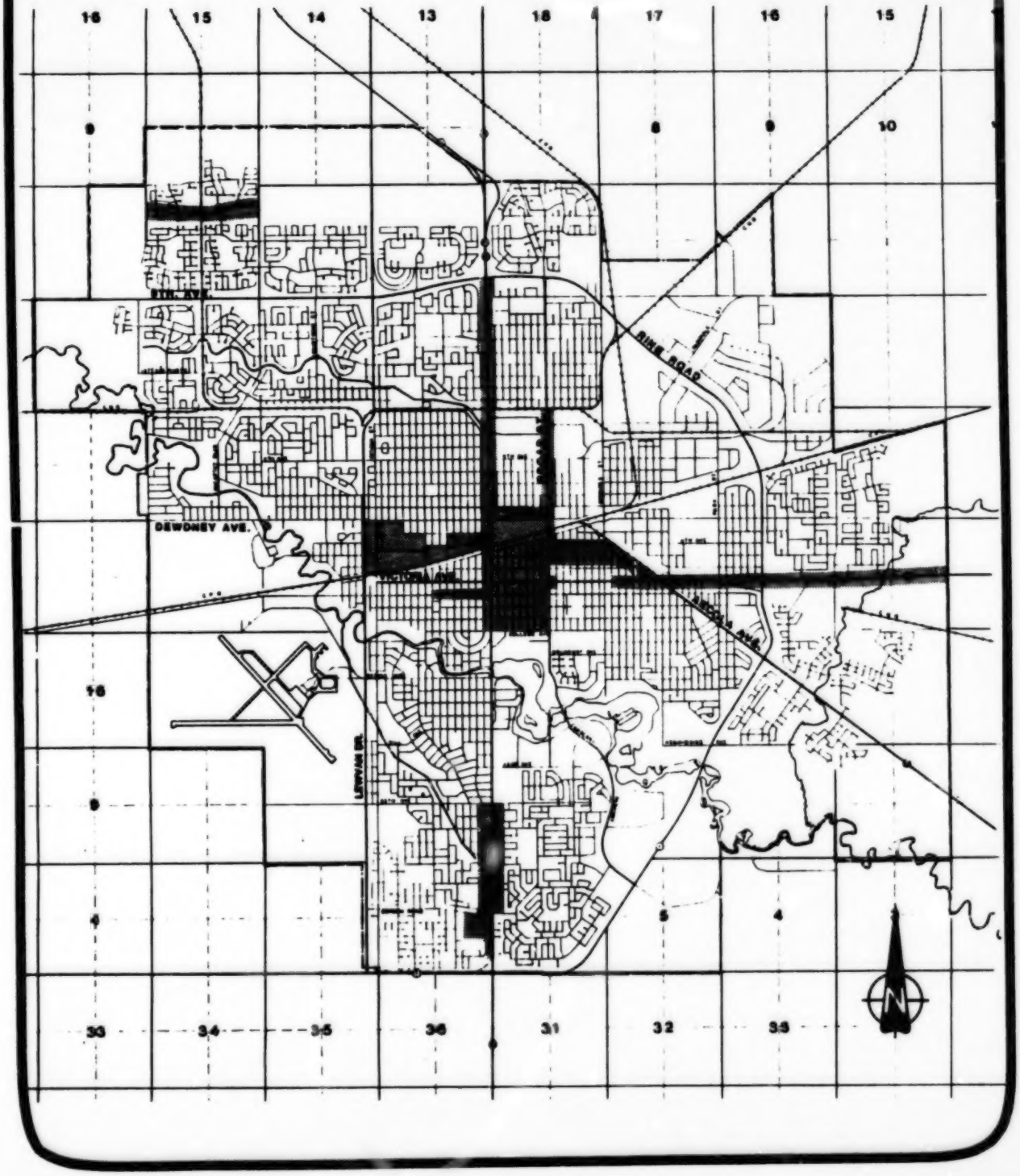
AREAS WITHIN THE CITY WHICH SHOULD BE CONSIDERED FOR URBAN DESIGN REVIEW PROCEDURES



D. THE DOWNTOWN ZONE.

5 DESIGN GUIDELINES

The following guidelines provide a qualitative basis for design interpretation, both on the part of those preparing development proposals and those charged with review and approval procedures. While full and complete compliance with each relevant guideline is a desirable objective, this may not be possible. Every effort should be made to fulfill the spirit and intent of each guideline.

(i) Retail Uses in the Retail Area

(a) In the retail area, maximize retail, restaurant and entertainment uses on the ground floors; and,

(b) restrict the street frontage of entrance lobbies for non-retail uses on upper floors; and,

(c) ensure that there is a continuity of shop windows along the street facade for the display of goods for sale or items of interest to passing pedestrians.

(d) Encourage the provision of weather protection for pedestrians in the retail area and at or close to important Transit locations in the form of awnings, canopies and arcaded areas.

(e) In the retail shopping area, encourage building facades at street level to be built at the property line; and,

(f) Encourage the provision of transparent facades at street level with well-lit windows. Avoid unlit blank walls.

(g) Encourage the provision of bright and colourful signage in pedestrian areas and particularly canopies and canopy signs with lighting underneath.

(ii) Streets and Parking

(a) Restrict access to parking lots or parkades in the retail area in order to reduce pedestrian/vehicular conflicts on the sidewalks.

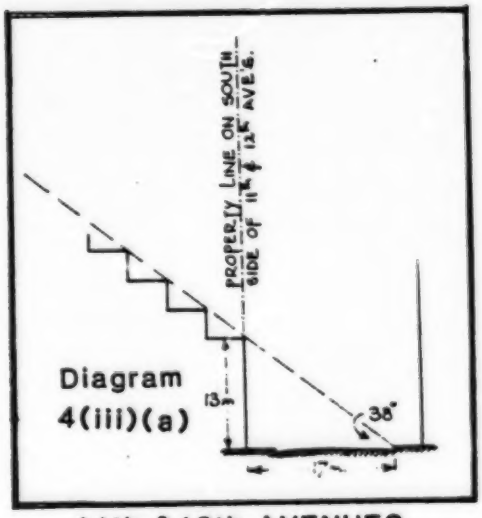
(b) Ensure that Victoria Avenue is an attractive ceremonial street and restrict or do not permit parking lots or parkades to front onto it; and,

(c) Restrict or do not permit access to parking lots or parkades along Broad and Albert Streets, in order to ensure unimpeded transit and traffic flow.

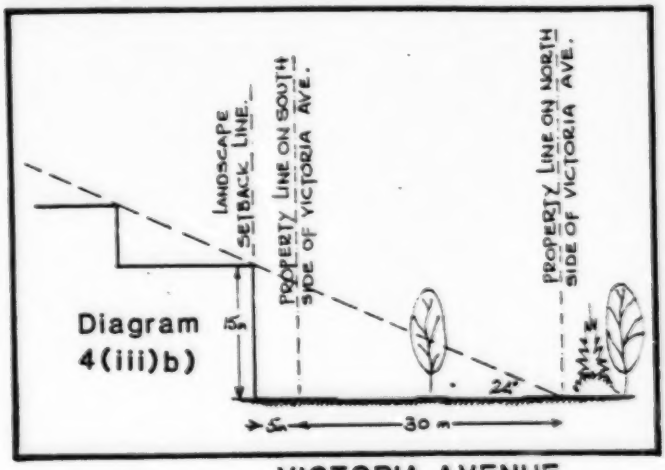
(iii) Building Height and Sunlight Penetration

(a) Restrict the degree to which tall buildings will cast shadows on the north sidewalks of 11th and 12th Avenues, during the summer months between March and September 21 and between 12 noon and 2:00 p.m. All new development should be setback in accordance with diagram 4 (iii) (a).

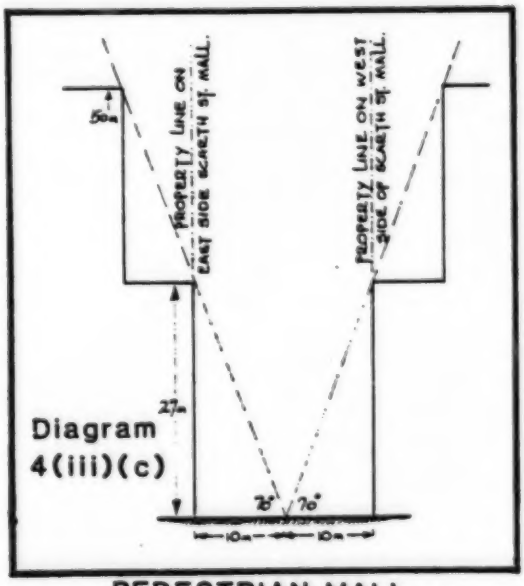
(b) Restrict the degree to which tall buildings will cast shadows on the north property line of Victoria Avenue between Cornwall and Albert Streets between November 10 and January 30 and between 12 noon and 2:00 p.m. All new development should be set back in accordance with diagram 4 (iii) (b).



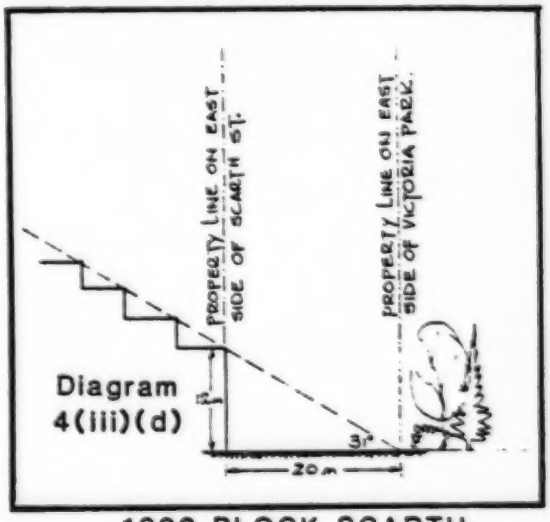
11th & 12th AVENUES.


LANDSCAPE SETBACK LINE.
PROPERTY LINE ON SOUTH SIDE OF VICTORIA AVE.
PROPERTY LINE ON NORTH SIDE OF VICTORIA AVE.
Diagram 4(iii)b)
30 m

VICTORIA AVENUE.



PEDESTRIAN MALL.



1900 BLOCK SCARTH.

(c) Ensure that at least half of the Scarth Street Mall is in direct sunshine, during the summer months between March and September 21 and between 12 noon and 2:00 p.m. All new development should be setback in accordance with diagram 4 (iii) (c).

(d) Restrict the degree to which tall buildings will cast shadows on the east boundary of Victoria Park in the 1900 block Scarth Street during the summer months between March and September 21 and after 10:00 a.m. All new development should be setback in accordance with diagram 4 (iii) (d).

(e) Encourage the development of low-rise buildings on the block bounded by 12th and Victoria Avenue and Smith and Lorne Streets in order to:

(i) extend the hours of sunlight penetration into both Victoria Park and Queen Elizabeth Plaza;

(ii) ensure that the melodic sound of the Darke bells on the Knox Metropolitan Church can be heard over as wide an area as possible; and,

(iii) preserve the visual dominance of the bell tower.

(f) Provide a height transition between the tall buildings of the downtown and the low-rise buildings of adjacent neighbourhoods.

(g) Tall buildings at the east and west edges of downtown should be constructed in such a manner as to ensure adequate daylight and sunlight into adjacent neighbourhoods, in the morning hours in the case of Angus Street and the afternoon hours in the case of Osler Street.

(h) Encourage variety and interesting features at the roof levels of tall buildings.

(i) Consider the appearance of the flat roofs on low buildings and encourage measures that will make them more attractive. Consider opportunities for recreational and other uses on large areas of low flat roofs.

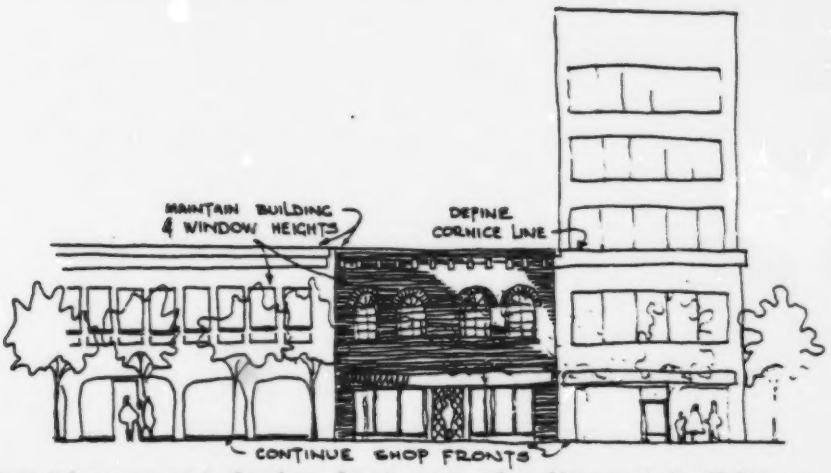
(j) where tall buildings are proposed encourage substantial setbacks at second or third floor levels in order to avoid the street canyon effect.

(iv) Relationship to Adjacent Buildings

(a) Encourage the retention of older buildings and particularly those that reflect the character of an immediate environment.

(b) Where new development is proposed adjacent to older buildings and particularly those that display a design quality appropriate to the area, maintain a continuity of and respect for important features such as rooflines, cornices, window heights, etc. in the new development.

(c) Where tall buildings are introduced into an area with predominately smaller buildings, provide a major break in the facade treatment to reflect predominant roof levels.



New developments should respect design features of adjacent buildings.

(v) Building Materials and Landscaping

(a) Discourage the use of smooth mirror-like finish materials on new buildings and particularly on the south facing walls of tall buildings.

(b) Encourage the use of warm toned brickwork and other textured materials, particularly for surface areas on the lower floors of new buildings and building renovations.

(c) Ensure that there is a setback along common property lines at the 2nd or 3rd floor levels in order to avoid tall, blank sidewalls.

(d) Preserve and protect existing mature trees and make every effort to ensure their retention when new development occurs.

(e) Where landscape areas or setbacks are proposed with new developments provide sufficient space for the planting of trees that can grow to a substantial size, and avoid low profile, high maintenance landscaping.

(vi) Lighting and Signage

(a) Throughout downtown, encourage special pedestrian level lighting on new and existing buildings where extensive blank walls are provided or necessary at street level.

(b) Encourage flood lighting on important government and institutional buildings and on important landscape features.